

Submission to Anishinabek News - January/February 2010

Resource Development for First Nations Requires Common Sense

Fort William FN - Grand Council Chief Pat Madahbee said practical approaches need to be considered during the resource development break-out session of the Ontario First Nations Economic Forum.

“We need to find some very common sense solutions,” Madahbee said. “What can we do to get some wins, some tangible results.”

Madahbee said First Nations need to promote their short, medium and long-term wins and successes.

“We need role models in industry and in business and in the whole economic sector as well,” Madahbee said.

Madahbee said Waubetek Business Development Corporation completed a leakage study on the amount of money that leaves First Nation communities for goods and services.

“In that small geographical area of seven First Nations a conservative estimate of \$82 million annually was being poured out into the surrounding non-native communities,” Madahbee said. “Why aren’t those stores and goods and services in our communities.”

Walpole Island Chief Joseph Gilbert spoke about the pharmaceutical and call centre businesses his community has invested in over the past year which serve First Nations and businesses in Canada and the United States.

“We have also invested in the electric car initiative on the U.S. side because there is tremendous opportunity there to gain revenue,” Gilbert said. “We presently own 35 per cent of that company.”

Gilbert said his community is expecting to draw back in over the next five years three to four times the amount of money currently coming into the community.

“It is amazing how quickly things can turn around,” Gilbert said. “We’ve seen that tremendous change in our future in just one year.”

Two Feathers Forest Products president Terry Favell spoke about the value-added forest company her community of Wabigoon Lake, Eagle Lake and Pikangikum are developing in partnership with Wood Tech Group in Finland.

“The jobs will be ramped up over the next five years,” Favell said, explaining the company’s markets are in Europe and Asia. “With the multiplier effects and the spinoffs in the northwestern Ontario region, we expect it be somewhere over 1,050 full-time sustainable jobs.”

Serpent River Chief Isadore Day said the treaties weren’t just about being able to hunt and fish.

“We definitely have a right to access these resources now to have economies in our communities,” Day said, adding he was disappointed with the low turnout of private industry representatives at the forum. “The bottom line is we need economies if the social conditions in our communities are to change. Collaborating with all economic proponents is actually going to be a prerequisite here.”